

Preventing Bloodborne Diseases: What You Need To Know

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Most occupations rarely put workers at risk of having contact with the blood and body fluids of another person. Other than those in health care settings, there are some occupations and activities that may result in exposure to blood and body fluids. For example, teachers, public safety personnel, sanitation workers, and others may have contact with a person who is bleeding, or may come into contact with blood or body fluids contaminating objects or surfaces.

If your job duties include even occasional contact with blood or body fluids, it is important to remember that it is not possible to tell if someone is infected with a disease by looking at them. Any person could have disease-causing germs in their body fluids, even if they have no signs or symptoms of illness. Know how to protect yourself, because understanding simple precautions can greatly reduce your chances of getting a bloodborne disease.

What are some of the bloodborne diseases that I can get from coming in contact with a person's blood or body fluids?

HIV infection, hepatitis B (HBV) and hepatitis C (HCV) are caused by viruses that are in the blood and body fluids of infected people. HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. HBV and HCV are viruses that infect and damage the liver.

How are HIV, HBV and HCV spread from one person to another?

These diseases are spread by direct contact with the blood and body fluids of an infected person. The contact has to result in the virus getting into the body (see below). Sharing needles to inject drugs or having sex with an infected person can spread these viruses. Pregnant women who are infected can pass these viruses to their babies at birth. HIV, HBV and HCV can also be spread by:

- Puncturing the skin with sharp objects that have infected blood and body fluids, such as needles, razors, knives, broken glass, or anything that can pierce or cut the skin.
- Splashing infected blood and body fluids into the tissues of the eyes, nose or mouth.
- Getting infected blood in open cuts or wounds.

What should I do if I am exposed to blood or body fluid?

Remember, it is not possible to tell if someone is infected with HIV, HBV or HCV just by looking at them. Take precautions for contact with *all* blood and body fluids; basically any "wet fluid" from another person (excluding sweat). If you get stuck by a needle or other sharp object, or get blood or body fluids in your eyes, nose, mouth, or on broken skin:

- Immediately flood the exposed area with water and clean any wound with soap and water or a skin disinfectant if available.
- If at work, report the exposure immediately to your employer.
- Seek medical attention. You may need to have your blood tested.

Are HIV, HBV and HCV spread through casual contact?

No. None of these diseases are spread through casual contact. You cannot get any of these diseases by holding hands, kissing or hugging, sneezing or coughing, eating food prepared by an infected person, sharing eating utensils, or visiting an infected person's home.

Can HIV, HBV and HCV survive outside the body?

These viruses can remain infectious on surfaces for variable periods of time, although once dry the chance of infection is very low. Nonetheless, it is important to clean up blood spills with a disinfectant or bleach solution (one part household bleach to 10 parts water).

How can I protect myself from getting HIV, HBV and HCV?

The best way to prevent getting a bloodborne disease is to avoid contact with the blood and body fluids of other people.

- Handwashing is the most important way to prevent the spread of many diseases. Wash your hands before and after eating, after using the bathroom, and especially after touching the blood or body fluids of someone else.
- Wear disposable gloves if you have to touch anyone's blood, body fluid or wound. Always wash your hands after removing gloves!
- Don't share razors, toothbrushes or other household items that may be contaminated with blood.
- Don't "shoot" or inject street drugs. If you shoot drugs, never share works with anyone. Wash your hands before and after injecting drugs. Don't share cocaine or snorting straws, since these can get blood on them too. Find out about treatment programs that can help you stop using drugs.
- Hepatitis B can be prevented by vaccination. Talk to your doctor about whether you should be vaccinated.
- Practice safer sex by using a latex condom correctly and consistently each time.
- Only get tattoos or body piercings from licensed facilities or places that use sterile equipment.

Where can I get more information about HIV, HBV, and HCV?

- Your doctor, nurse or clinic
- The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH), Division of Epidemiology and Immunization at: (617) 983-6800 or toll-free at (888) 658-2850 or, on the MDPH website at <http://www.mass.gov/dph>
- The MDPH Hepatitis C Hotline at 1-888-443-hepC (4372)
- OSHA Bloodborne Pathogen and Needlestick Prevention: <http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/bloodbornepathogens/index.html>